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AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

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A Brief History of the Bracero System
and its Impact on Farm Labor in California

P R E F A C E

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THE FARM LABOR PROBLEM IN CALIFORNIA

Introduction

Throughout its history, agriculture in California has been characterized by crop specialization, concentration of land ownership in a few large producers and reliance on a large force of seasonal farm workers. These three major factors, along with the natural gifts of soil, climate and water, have combined to create an industry whose annual product exceeds \$3.5 billion.

The progress of the agricultural industry in California has been possible because of the availability of a cheap, unorganized but highly productive labor force. This force has generally been in abundant supply. Successive waves of immigration, supplemented by domestic migration, have provided a farm labor surplus since the 1880's. During wartime, when labor demand exceeded supply, various emergency supplemental labor schemes have been used to augment the labor supply. The bracero program, which was terminated in December, 1964, was initiated during World War II and again during Korean conflict to recruit foreign nationals to work in American agriculture.

While the industry has prospered, the individual farm worker has suffered low wages, poor working conditions and a variety of indignities which made him the subject of a score of governmental and private investigations. The farm worker has seen well-meaning public and private efforts on his behalf come and go while the basic fact of his situation has remained unchanged. In relation to other industrial employment, his situation has gotten progressively worse.

The agricultural labor market developed around a continued surplus of temporary workers. These workers appeared at the harvest and vanished until the next year. The industry encouraged this system and constantly pressed for additional labor to ensure the surplus that would perpetuate low wages. As twentieth century social legislation was passed protecting the rights of industrial employees, the agricultural industry carefully exempted itself and its employees. A combination of desperate self-protection by the industry and apathy by the public has allowed the farm worker to be legally discriminated against and forced to the fringe of society.

The termination of the bracero program in 1964, has provided a fresh opportunity for progress in developing an efficient and socially acceptable agricultural labor market which will benefit society, the industry and the farm worker.

Before the Bracero

Since the days of the Spanish missions, California land ownership has been concentrated in large holdings. Early agriculture was related to the missions but Mexican independence in 1818, gave the authority to make land grants to the Mexican governor who by 1846 had made nearly 800 grants of lands to individuals. While governed by Mexico, California agriculture was dominated by large ranchos devoted to extensive farming. The Gold Rush and California statehood did not significantly change the pattern of land ownership. The U. S. Government, in an attempt to encourage railroad development, made large land grants to the railroads. The Central Pacific received more than 10 million acres of land from the public domain which along with subsequent grants made it the largest land owner in California as well as Nevada.¹

The Cobey Report describes the structure of California agriculture during this period as "notable for its characteristics of crop specialization and large scale ownership, and although still extensive in nature, was using principally hired labor as opposed to self-employment because of the scale of ownership."²

Reduction of activity in the gold mines and the completion of railroad construction in 1869 released thousands of immigrant Chinese for work in California agriculture. As these casual workers became available, the agriculture industry, already characterized by concentration of land ownership, began to convert into labor-intensive specialty crops which relied on such seasonal labor. Grains and livestock were replaced by fruits, nuts and vegetables. Systems of cultivation changed with no significant change in the pattern of land ownership. By 1885, California had developed the agricultural system which exists to this day. Requiring an abundance of seasonal labor, it was "built upon the assumption that a labor force able to accommodate itself to these requirements would continue to exist."³

¹George E. Mowry, The California Progressives, (Berkeley, 1951) p. 11.

²Senate Fact Finding Committee on Labor and Welfare, California's Farm Labor Problems, 2 vols., (Sacramento 1961), I, 13, hereafter "the Cobey Report."

³Lloyd H. Fisher, The Harvest Labor Market in California, (Cambridge, 1953) p. 4.

The Chinese played an increasingly important part in the farm labor market until 1882 when further immigration was ended by the Chinese Exclusion Act. California agriculture then turned to Japan to maintain the flow of immigrant seasonal labor. As the Japanese became more experienced in the farm labor market, they too were excluded by the "Gentlemen's Agreement" of 1906. The Hindustani immigrants who followed were in turn cut off by the Immigration Act of 1917.

The labor force during World War I was augmented by emergency elements including women, prison inmates, youth and prisoners of war. Mexican Nationals were also used extensively. After the war, Mexican immigration supplemented by 30,000 Filipinos became the major source of supply. Soon after the first attempts at unionization of Mexican workers, Mexican nationals were repatriated to Mexico. Filipino Immigration was halted by the Filipino Independence Act of 1934.

The depression provided 1,250,000 migrants to California from the dust bowl area. Many of these provided the seasonal labor previously supplied by Chinese, Japanese, Hindustani, Mexicans, and Filipinos. As World War II lured the depression immigrants into the armed forces and war industry, California agriculture again looked to Mexico to supply the seasonal labor demanded by the industry. In 1942, an informal agreement with the Mexican government structured the first Mexican Contract Labor Program which evolved without interruption into the bracero system in 1951.

CONTRACT MEXICAN NATIONALS
IN CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE BEFORE
PUBLIC LAW 78 (JULY 1951)

	<u>MAXIMUM</u>	<u>MINIMUM</u>
1944	36,600	12,000
1945	32,400	18,900
1946	20,700	13,800
1947	18,100	12,800
1948	10,300	6,300
1949	7,500	3,100
1950	10,100	5,700
1951		10,800

FROM: State of California, Department of Employment, Mexican Nationals in California Agriculture 1942-1959, November 2, 1959, p. 4.

For nearly one hundred years, California agriculture has prospered using a temporary labor force constantly replenished by new waves of immigration. Characteristically, the solution to California's farm labor problem has been to find a new source of seasonal labor rather than change the system which demands such labor.

Unionization

Just as the availability of labor discouraged employer initiative, farm workers discovered that they could not effect change. Attempts at union organization were made at various times with little success. As ethnic groups organized into protective societies, they found themselves replaced by a more recent and poorer immigrant group.

The early ethnic societies, particularly among the Japanese and Filipinos, were weakened by competition from other immigrant groups. Attempts at unionization by the Industrial Workers of the World resulted in the bloody Wheatland riot in 1913 before the suppression of the I.W.W. through the prosecution and imprisonment of I.W.W. leadership. Spontaneous organization led to a major strike among Mexican cantaloupe workers in Imperial County in 1928 which was finally broken by employers.

The most sustained attempt at union organization of California farm workers were carried out during the social ferment of the 1930's. In spite of aggressive opposition by the industry which used a variety of legal and extralegal forms of intimidation, unionization was successful in raising wages but failed to establish any permanent organizational base. The period 1933 to 1939 saw 65 agricultural strikes in California.⁴ Of these, 39 had arrests, 32 included violence and 5 had deaths related to the strike. Except for the organization and stabilization of seasonal packinghouse employees, no agricultural unionization survived the war. An A.F. of L. affiliate, the National Farm Labor Union, was active during the late 1940's but lost its major confrontation in a bitter 32-month strike at Di Giorgio properties in Kern County.

In general, the same factors which had kept farm workers poor and the labor market disorganized were responsible for preventing any effective and permanent unionization of seasonal farm workers.

⁴Fisher, op. cit., p. 91

The unstructured seasonal labor market was sustained by the continual influx of a new and desperate immigrant laborer. High seasonal labor requirements meant that the industry could absorb almost any number of workers at peak periods and maintain a surplus during most of the year. By requiring no skills, the harvest labor force could afford to employ the poorest at the lowest wages. By providing temporary employment, the industry encouraged the migrancy, anonymity and disorganization of its labor force. Those factors which effectively prevented improvement in the farm labor market were the direct and necessary result of the abundant labor supply. An industry spokesman, Harry L. McKee, president of the Seaboard-Somis Lemon Association, described the effect of abundant labor on his industry in the January, 1964 California Citrograph:

" . . . with few exceptions, the lemon grower is still using methods to harvest his crops only slightly modified since the beginning of the industry. . . of course there is a good reason for this. We simply haven't been forced to change our methods. There has always been a plentiful supply of labor, either domestic or foreign which has been available when needed."

The Bracero System

History

No single event in the history of farm labor in California was as destructive to change in California agriculture as the enactment of Public Law 78 in 1951. Passed as an emergency measure to authorize the use of supplemental labor during the Korean conflict, the bracero program provided a guaranteed labor supply which essentially removed labor from consideration as a factor in agricultural production. Unlike water or fertilizer, labor became an automatic commodity guaranteed, upon request, by an agency of the United States Government. As a 1963 Gianinni Foundation report describes it, ". . . the Mexican contract (Bracero) labor source is an important one to California agriculture, both in terms of the manpower it contributes and also in terms of the insurance it provides against uncertainty of labor supply."⁵

Before braceros were made available to any employer, the Department of Labor had to certify that a labor shortage existed and that the use of foreign nationals would not adversely effect the wages and working conditions of domestic farm workers. In practice this meant that if preseason wage rates offered by growers did not attract sufficient domestic workers, the government would furnish braceros at the "prevailing" wage. In crops where the preseason scale attracted no domestic labor, there would be no actual prevailing wage. The wage which was offered by farmers and rejected by domestic labor became the wage which prevailed. Of 202 wage surveys in California in 1961, 52 were in crop areas which were so dominated by Braceros that the government could not find a wage paid to domestic workers.

The net effect of this federally administered wage system was to freeze wages. In 70% of the 471 areas which used Braceros during the period 1953 to 1959, farm wages either declined or remained constant.

⁵ Seasonal Labor in California, Division of Agricultural Sciences University of California, Berkeley, March 1963, p. VI.

CONTRACT MEXICAN NATIONAL FARM
WORKERS IN CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE
UNDER P. L. 78

	<u>MAXIMUM EMPLOYED</u>	<u>MINIMUM EMPLOYED</u>
1951	36,200	12,400
1952	39,500	17,300
1953	40,000	13,500
1954	51,200	20,600
1955	77,200	26,600
1956	100,800	26,600
1957	93,100	26,200
1958	92,400	25,800
1959	83,000	27,600
1960	74,250	27,300
1961	65,660	18,600
1962	74,170	17,100
1963	62,670	11,200
1964	63,150	10,300

It was absurd to hold, as the employers and the governmental agencies did, that the availability of an inexhaustible supply of labor did not directly depress wages. The scandal was not in the spectacular and sordid violations of the law which opponents publicized but in the fact that the United States government was operating a farm labor program in the labor market which eliminated competition and prevented improvement. Administrative elimination of abuses and indignities did not remove the adverse effect which was implicit in such a program. The bracero period, 1951 to 1954, was one during which progress was nearly stopped. Wages were fixed, working conditions did not change, the labor market was frozen at the point in history when the federal government guaranteed labor on the request of the producer. By the early 1960's, farm workers and their sympathizers were not asking for social progress, but for a return to the anarchy of 1950 before the availability of contract workers made progress impossible. The hope was not that public social policy would intervene in a market between vastly unequal forces, but only that the government refrain from protecting the employer from the free labor market system.

The bracero interregnum not only stabilized the labor force but it reinforced an artificial economic structure by allowing accommodations based on bracero labor. Patterns of cultivation and labor use were changed to take advantage of this labor subsidy. Inefficient use of labor was encouraged by a system which made labor and unlimited resource protected by federal regulation against any free-market pressures of supply and demand.

The solution became the problem. The emergency labor force to fill wartime shortages became the fundamental obstacle which prevented improvement and change. By fixing conditions and wages at 1951 levels, the program encouraged migration of domestic workers out of bracero dominated crops. Family housing could then be replaced by facilities for organized groups of single men. The program was self-perpetuating as farmers were given an incentive to grow crops with heavy hand labor demands. Not only crops, but areas became bracero dominated. The system created a need for itself. Increased use of nationals created a pattern of dependence and inflexibility on the part of the employers. Even the non-user was always protected with the knowledge that he could get nationals if domestics were not available at the wage he wanted to pay.

Perhaps the most disastrous result of the bracero system was public acceptance of the concept that the government is responsible for supplying labor to the agricultural industry. The idea was not new. Growers have always been able to panic local officials with the threat of crop loss. School dates for instance, are often changed at the request of growers to provide youth for the temporary labor force. Welfare recipients, jail inmates, boy scouts, service clubs and church groups are sometimes mobilized in a frenzy of pious public concern about the local agricultural economy. Government agencies had acknowledged the importance of agriculture to the national economy during wartime by supplying prisoners of war, jail inmates and other involuntary labor to the industry. The five years during which the Farm Placement Service was supervised by county farm advisors, reinforced the notion that the public agency was to serve the farmer. The bracero system elevated local and emergency concerns to national policy. Without noticeable opposition, it was established, apparently forever, that it is the responsibility of the United States government to provide whatever labor may be required by the agricultural industry without regard to any other considerations.

This bracero premise still exists. The major activity of governmental agencies since the 1964 termination of the bracero system has been to recruit labor for agriculture. Although supplemental labor is more difficult to justify and wages have increased, the major premise remains. Agricultural labor supply is a public responsibility.

The Perpetuation of the System

It is not possible to explain the perpetuation of the bracero system on any basis other than the political power of a small but well organized part of the agricultural industry acting in raw economic self-interest. The industry was successful, not through reasonable argument, but through power unopposed by organized victims or by an informed public.

The arguments which sustained Public Law 78 through five Congressional debates are myths which are demonstrably false yet they continue to be generally accepted by the public and its elected representatives. The basic premise is that there was an inadequate supply of domestic farm labor. The labor shortage myth has several subordinate myths which were used to prove inadequacy.

1. The stoop labor myth - agricultural producers, public agencies, the Universities and the press all agreed that those domestic farm workers who did exist were unwilling or unable to do certain types of work which they termed stoop labor. It was argued that domestic labor was unavailable for this work and thus supplemental labor was indicated. The agreement had historically been used to justify the use of Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and Hindu labor.⁶

Opponents of the system and its subordinate mythology have been unsuccessful in pointing out that many industrial jobs in America are as arduous as agriculture remain able to attract their own labor. The fact that domestic farm workers were doing stoop labor in many crops was not damaging to the myth. In some areas, particularly the Southern California Citrus industry, braceros were used solely in tree crops with no impact on the myth. In fact in several California areas, the bracero was in the tree crop while the domestic worker could only get stoop labor.

Among bizarre arguments in a history full of them, was the suggestion that Mexicans under Public Law 78, were built closer to the ground and thus, were physically suited to stoop labor. Somehow, the same worker here as an immigrant ceased to be suited for stoop labor.

An interesting aspect of the stoop labor myth is its premise that, although farm labor is unacceptable to Americans, it is acceptable to Mexicans. The obvious implication is that only a desperately hungry and poor group is adequately motivated to do stoop labor. This myth has been supported by the influx of successive waves of poor, exploitable immigrant groups which are replaced as they begin to make changes in the system.

⁶ According to Factories in the Field, the myth was then called "squat labor" but the argument hasn't changed.

The California Farm Labor panel, in its review of the first year without braceros lays the stoop labor notion to rest with a direct attack: "Nothing that has occurred in California agriculture this year supports the repeated charge -- which we now assert to be a myth -- that no American workers will perform 'stoop labor.' On the contrary, there is ample evidence that Americans will perform even more onerous work, provided that the wages are fair and the working conditions are decent."⁷

2. The wino myth - Many reasonable participants and observers generalized about the farm labor force based upon experience with the skid row day haul system in the larger cities. When required, as a condition for bracero certification, to use day haul recruiting, growers were able to tell harrowing stories about the domestic labor supply. Even the A.F.L.-C.I.O. contributed to the wino image by concentrating much of its organizational effort in central Stockton. The most constant source of support for this myth has been the Department of Employment. Captive to the myths of the growers which it has long since internalized, the Department of Employment goes to skid row now when it needs to locate farm workers. This has proved an efficient and easy way to contact unemployed men. Frequently, it has provided excellent referral statistics by crediting the agency with a separate placement each day for the same casual worker. The statistics on labor turn-over and the personal anecdotes have been devastating and self-perpetuating. By its inability to contact reliable workers, the Department was able to testify that there were none available. By continually referring the most marginal and unacceptable worker, the Department proved to employers that stable domestic workers were not available.

The fact is that the skid row population is as marginal to the agricultural labor market as it is to society in general. The farm labor force only includes the social cast-off at times of peak demand. The regular farm worker is poor and often uneducated but he is efficient and experienced. Knowing the reputation of the Farm Placement Service among employers, he will find his own jobs. He knows that attractive employment does not need to recruit through Farm Labor office just as the employer knows that the better workers do not need to use farm placement to find a job. The state serves the marginal employer and employee.

⁷ California Farm Labor Panel, Final Report to Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz, (Los Angeles, 1965) p. 42.

A 1963 study by the State Department of Public Health found that 61% of the resident farm workers had never been in the farm labor office. Among migrants from Mexico, 91% said they did not use the Farm Placement Service.

3. The myth of agriculture, the great exception - a premise which frequently requires restatement is that the agricultural industry is unique and thus exempt from any sort of social responsibility. This is variously based on the importance of food for human survival, the perishability of the agricultural product, the existence of uncontrollable variables including weather and market price and the impact of agriculture on related industry. The general accuracy of the claims of unique problems does not logically establish the exemption from the fundamental social standards of our culture. The complexity of problems, which are daily being aggravated by the industry, is not sufficient reason to exempt the industry from its social responsibility.

4. The supplemental labor myth - the industry often contended that braceros were only used to fill demand which exceeded supply at the harvest. The actual use demonstrated that in many areas, braceros had come to dominate the labor force during most of the year.

5. The foreign aid argument - a peripheral argument was that the bracero program was an effective way of putting millions of dollars into the Mexican economy. This may have been true except that the "aid" appears to have been at the expense of the poorest segment of the American economy.

6. The wetback myth - Agricultural employers argued that termination of the bracero program would bring a return of wetback labor, Mexican Nationals who had entered the United States illegally. They pointed out that since 1954, when over 84,000 wetbacks were apprehended and returned to Mexico, contract labor had effectively eliminated wetbacks.

Like many other myths, this one implies the grower is a victim of forces beyond his control. He is the one who is responsible for encouraging illegal aliens by offering them employment. Without the attraction of easy employment in agriculture, wetbacks would not enter the country as demonstrated during the last ten years of the bracero system. Any return of the wetback problem is directly the result of employer inducement and lax control by the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the U. S. Department of Justice.

7. The community impact myth - growers pointed out that the social cost of the bracero was low as he was returned to Mexico as soon as his employment ceased. The bracero had no children to educate, no welfare expenses and all housing and health services were provided at no cost to the taxpayer.

Growers threatened to vigorously recruit unemployed families from throughout the United States to fill the "bracero gap." As announced in the August 1963 issue of Western Fruit Grower, "When these people arrive, they become the responsibility of the taxpayers, not just agriculture," (p. 5).

This threat became a desperation gamble by the growers as they began to realize that the bracero system was nearly over. The myth caused panic among many local officials but the vast migration of poor never materialized.

The 1963 Gianinni Report weaves together several of the prevalent myths as it proves the need for the continuation of the program: "Among the many groups that have served California farming, there is no doubt that the Bracero has been one of the most productive. In addition to their willingness to work in some of the crops and operations that have not been highly attractive to domestic workers, the Braceros have played the important role of being a supplemental labor supply. Consequently, their role has been not only that of workers, as such, but also of greatly reducing the uncertainty of there being an adequate supply. The critical significance of a supplemental source of labor is the assurance it gives that the crops will be harvested, even if domestic supply proves to be insufficient. Therefore, in terms both of relieving uncertainty and of doing a substantial share, of the state's farm work, the Bracero's contribution was great."

Contributions of the Bracero Program

Although Public Law 78 prevented any fundamental change in the farm labor market, it did make several contributions to the industry. Growers who had previously competed for seasonal labor, worked through voluntary organizations to plan the use of bracero labor. This rationalization of labor use could be extended to all labor used by the industry. The bracero program, although subject to many abuses, was governed by a written agreement. This contract established the mutual rights and responsibilities of the employer

and the employee. The standard work contract was not reached after any process of collective bargaining but it guaranteed minimum protections to the employee which the domestic farm worker had never had. The bracero program also established a set of minimum standards in housing, sanitation, transportation and employment which were enforced by the U. S. Department of Labor. A guaranteed minimum wage and minimum employment encouraged efficient labor utilization by employers.

Public Law 78 mandated a written contract, minimum standards, pre-season planning and joint effort by employers acting through voluntary associations. All of these are improvements in the seasonal farm labor market which would improve conditions and rationalize labor utilization if adopted permanently. It should be pointed out that the agreements and contracts of the bracero program were not negotiated between equals but demanded by international treaty as a condition of using braceros. In general braceros were not aware of their rights under the contract which ostensibly protected them.

Termination of the Bracero Program

By 1964, the peak number of braceros used had declined from a high of 100,800 in 1956 to 63,150. Northern congressmen, faced with unemployment in their districts, were not willing to support an extension. Mechanization in the cotton harvest reduced support from Southern congressmen who previously had benefited from bracero labor. The burden of extension rested with a small group of special-interest Representatives from the Southwest. Arrayed against these were religious, trade union and consumer groups. Even Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz conceded in 1963 that under the bracero system, "domestic agricultural workers found themselves competing for available job opportunities with an almost inexhaustible supply of workers from areas where wages and working conditions were substantially less favorable than those which prevailed in this country."

A last minute reprieve in 1963 served notice on agricultural employers that termination was imminent. In 1964, Congress refused to extend the program.

The bracero program was a short-run expedient to solve farm labor uncertainty during the Korean War. It was not intended as a permanent solution to uncertainty in the farm labor market. The operation of the program for fourteen years only ensured that no permanent solution to the program would be attempted. The 1964 termination will allow agriculture to seek a permanent solution to its labor problems.

Since the Bracero

The Year of Transition

Although publicized as an abrupt termination of foreign labor importation, the two years since the end of the bracero program are perhaps more accurately described as a controlled transition to a domestic labor force. The major effect of termination was to reduce the utilization of supplemental workers by convincing employers that braceros would only be available for situations of demonstrable need. The Secretary of Labor in announcing the impending termination pointed to "accumulating evidence that U. S. workers will be available to do this work if decent working conditions are provided and if it is paid for on terms in line with those for other work that is equally hard and unpleasant."⁸ With this premise, the Secretary established wage and recruiting standards which forced employers to exhaust the domestic labor force before requesting supplemental workers. Secretary Wirtz appointed a panel of three prominent California professors to assist him in reviewing the requests for supplemental workers. This panel held public hearings and supervised the year of transition.

The actual utilization of braceros was limited to a few crops and areas which had been nearly totally dependent on bracero labor. Overall there was a 91% reduction in the amount of bracero labor in California. In the Salinas Valley and the tomato harvest of the San Joaquin delta, braceros were used although in sharply reduced numbers. After its April 15, 1965, appointment, the California Farm Labor Panel recommended to the Secretary of Labor approval of the following requests for braceros:⁹

April 23	Asparagus	1000
	Strawberries	1500
May 19	Strawberries	1000
August 10	Tomatoes	8900
August 26	Tomatoes	9500

Secretary Wirtz approved the recommendations of the California Farm Labor Panel without change.

⁸ California Farm Labor Panel, Final Report to Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz (Los Angeles, 1965) p. 4.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 47-49.

Mechanization and more efficient utilization of the domestic labor force allowed the transition to occur with only a slight increase in employment of domestic farm workers. Contrasted to grower estimates that it would take three or more domestic workers to replace a bracero, the statistics indicate that each new domestic worker replaced $2\frac{1}{4}$ braceros.¹⁰

SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT IN CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE

Seasonal Man Years of Foreign and Domestic Labor 1959-65

	TOTAL	DOMESTIC	DOMESTIC % OF TOTAL	CONTRACT FOREIGN	FOREIGN % OF TOTAL
1959-64 average	136,280	100,500	73.7	35,780	26.3
1965	118,200	115,000	97.3	3,200	2.7

The bracero gap of 32,580 man years of seasonal farm labor was replaced by 14,500 man years of domestic labor and improved efficiency and productivity.

The canning tomato harvest was the big test in the year of transition. Tomatoes had had the highest peak labor demand of bracero-dominated crops. To complicate matters, the tomato harvest coincided with the peak labor demand in crops which had traditionally used domestic labor. Growers and processors reduced acreage by 18.7% but increased yields, the total value of the crop increased 31% over the five year average. Tomato growers threatened economic disaster unless braceros were made available. Using less than 30% of the labor industry had demanded, the harvest was efficient and orderly.

MEXICAN CONTRACT LABOR USED IN THE 1965 TOMATO HARVEST UNDER P. L. 414*

	<u>WORKERS</u>	<u>MAN DAYS</u>
requested by growers	29,859	2,059,372
certified by state	18,785	1,335,599
approved by Department of Labor	18,400	1,159,176
actual arrivals	17,597	895,933
actually available for tomato harvest	14,626	607,798

¹⁰Ibid, p. 7

*Ibid, pp. 50-52

Most of the crops which had previously been bracero dominated used to attract foreign workers for a brief period early in the year. By the time of the appointment of the California Farm Labor Panel, these crops had completed the transition to a domestic labor force.

DOMESTIC WORKERS AS A PERCENTAGE
OF THE SEASONAL FARM LABOR FORCE
IN CALIFORNIA*

<u>CROP</u>	<u>1961 - 1964</u> <u>AVERAGE</u>	<u>1965</u>
Statewide	73.7%	97.3%
Tomatoes (canning)	21.1%	67.4%
Strawberries	25.6%	89.0%
Lettuce	28.9%	98.3%
Valencia oranges	33.5%	100.0%
Navel oranges	81.4%	99.5%
Lemons	19.6%	97.7%
Melons	47.3%	100.0%
Asparagus	51.3%	90.8%

Ibid, p. 7, 15, 17, 19, 21-24, 26, 27.

The second year after the termination of Public Law 78, saw further reduction in the numbers of Mexican contract workers admitted to California. According to Department of Labor officials, only 8,775 braceros were approved for California during 1966. The crops which required foreign workers were strawberries 2,000, brussels sprouts 775 and tomatoes for processing 6,000.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the transition was that it was accomplished as painlessly and quickly as it was. Certainly the ease of change indicated how inaccurate and erroneous the arguments and mythology of the growers and the Gianinni Foundation had been.

The year of transition proved conclusively that the bracero program had adversely effected the wages and working conditions of domestic workers. Even areas where braceros had not been employed showed a general wage advance of nearly thirty percent.

Contrary to industry threats, there was no general move of California agriculture to Mexico. In some crops there was a slight reduction in acreage and increased mechanization in others. Except for isolated cases in strawberries and asparagus, there were no reports of crop loss.

The Southern California citrus industry refused to meet the criteria established by the Secretary of Labor and thus chose to make itself ineligible for braceros. Using a variety of incentives the industry was able quickly to convert to a reliable non-bracero labor force.

Governmental agencies intensified and augmented their recruitment programs with some success. Youth crews were organized and imported from other states. Manpower Development Training Programs were used to prepare recruits for the hardships of farm work. Training programs, like the one at Davis to train tomato pickers, generally reflected the attitude that farm work is somehow contemptible and that the purpose of training should be to prepare the potential farm worker for the rigors of the job.

In training and recruiting, it continued to be public social policy to accept the farm labor market as inadequate to meet needs and to attempt to deliver whatever human raw material the agricultural industry demanded. Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz, with his "adverse effect" criteria, stimulated a quick and substantial improvement in wages. Once criteria was satisfied, the Department of Labor reverted to its previous role agent for an industry which refuses to attract and hold its own labor supply. Wirtz was courageous and effective in establishing a policy and enforcing it. The misfortune is that the conceptual breakthrough did not materialize which would have freed government from the responsibility for sustaining an inefficient and non-competitive labor market.

Bracero Termination and Union Organization

The bracero program held wages down by providing a limitless supply of workers. The same supply prevented any effective unionization of farm workers. Braceros were used illegally as strike-breakers but their major impact was on organization. Braceros, although guaranteed the right to organize by international treaty, were kept as virtual prisoners on private property where organizers could not reach them.

In 1959, the AFL-CIO began a major effort to bring unionization to farm workers in California through its affiliate, the Agriculture Workers Organizing Committee. Beginning in late 1959, AWOC used strikes during the harvest of perishable tree fruits to demand union recognition. Although most of the strikes were unsuccessful in getting a contract, there was a general increase in farm labor wages. AWOC first focused its efforts in crops

characterized by large numbers of experienced Anglo migrants. In 1960, AWOOC had 31 strikes certified in the olives in Tulare County, 19 in the leaches in Stanislaus County and 15 in the pears in Lake County. In the winter of 1961, AWOOC concentrated all of its resources in Imperial County. Although strikes were certified against 18 growers and mass picketing was used, lettuce growers were able to use strike-breakers, some of them braceros, and intimidation to blunt the strike. When the strike finally collapsed after withdrawal of AFL-CIO support, AWOOC made a fundamental change in strategy and concentrated its work in the San Joaquin Valley. During the first two years, AWOOC selected crops with volatile labor requirements, demanded a wage increase and enforced this demand with picketing. The strategy after 1961 was to begin with basic organization in selected communities in which the labor market was stable and concentrated. Although few major strikes were attempted during this period, an organizational base was established among Filipino workers in the Delano area which was responsible for initiating the Delano grape strike in 1965. AWOOC merged with Cesar Chavez' National Farm Workers Association in 1966.

The National Farm Workers Association was a union based upon community development approaches to grass roots organization. Cesar Chavez and other NFWA organizers had been working with groups of farm workers in Kings, Kern and Tulare Counties since 1961. The organization was built on services to members. Early organizational tools included burial insurance, a credit union, a newspaper and a cooperative store. By 1965, NFWA members were getting experience in small strikes to raise wages in the roses and grape culture and to reduce rents in a public labor camp. When AWOOC declared a strike against Delano grape growers, the predominantly Mexican-American membership of NFWA voted to join the strike.

During the 1965 harvest period, the two unions concentrated on picketing the vineyards and packinghouses, using tactics learned from the civil rights movement. During the winter, the unions concentrated on a national boycott of Delano grape products. In the spring of 1966 the unions organized a 300 mile Easter march to the state capitol in Sacramento. During the march, Schenley Industries, which farms 3,500 acres within the strike area, agreed to negotiate with the union. During the summer, AWOOC and NFWA merged and won a union representation election at the largest ranch in the area, the Di Giorgio Corporation.

After nineteen months, the merged unions are continuing their strike against Delano area grape growers. Although the two largest ranches have recognized the union and entered negotiations, many small ranches continue to resist the union. Recognition of the union by Schenley and DiGiorgio is the greatest success of any union in California farm labor history. Significantly, this progress was not possible until the threat of abundant supplemental labor was removed with the termination of the bracero program.

The Farm Workers Opportunity Project

Oxnard, California

Farm Workers Opportunity Project was originally designed as experimental and demonstration Manpower Development and Training program that would assist in the elimination of the Mexican Bracero program. Funded by the U.S. Labor Department's Office of Manpower, Policy, Evaluation and Research in the midst of the "Farm Labor Revolution" of 1965, the project gave 208 seasonal farm workers intensive basic education for periods up to one year. The trainees received 30 hours of training a week for which they received MDTA training allowances. Ninety percent of the workers in the program were recent immigrants from Mexico or Spanish-speaking Mexican-Americans. The education program was supported by an individual and group counseling program that took place during the week ends or evenings. Group counseling which was directed at both trainees and other farm workers in the area, gave rise to numerous community organization activities among farm workers in Ventura County. Farm workers organized buying clubs, an alumni association, fiestas and the Santa Paula Crusade Against Poverty an independent community organization that obtained a grant on Poverty grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Supplemental agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor in June, 1966 became "Operation Harvest Hands" which was a nine month survey, counseling and community development program. Operation Harvest Hands took place throughout California with a part time and full time staff of counselors that visited 20,000 farm workers from Yuba City in the north to the Mexican border in the South.

Farm Workers Opportunity Project has completed a number of special studies and reports on farm labor. These have included reports on wages, working conditions and training desired by farm workers, farm workers and the law; the seasonal farm worker and community organization; a brief history of the bracero program and the University of California and the farmer.

As of mid-1967, the American Friends Service Committee's Farm Workers Opportunity Project continues to offer a research and technical assistance program to seasonal farm workers. This includes a limited program development function and the issuance of special studies on farm labor problems.
